

### BOOK REVIEWS

**Modumedi Moleli** By *B. Graaf*. Gweru, Mambo Press, 1988, 135 pp., ISBN 0-86922-375-5, Z\$8.44.

This is a biography of teacher-evangelist Modumedi Moleli who was martyred in the 1896-7 Shona uprising. Graaf portrays the selfless commitment and bold personality of Moleli and sheds light on the variety of historical realities and trying circumstances within which Moleli made crucial decisions to which he tenaciously adhered.

Moleli was brought up in Mpahlele among the Baralong of the Northern Transvaal and became associated with the Wesleyan Methodist Church community which was founded in about 1867 by a former migrant worker in Natal, Samuel Mathabathe. This community was plagued by persecution and suffering as a result of clashes with traditional customs and beliefs and ultimately was driven into exile over a dispute centred on the fate of twins born to one of the Christian families.

The period 1867-85 constituted a formative phase for Moleli, who, through the trials of the Christian community, grew to have confidence in his faith and in his ability to stand as an independent Christian. The second phase of Moleli's life spans the years 1885-93, a period in which the exiled church's hope for a missionary was realized when the Revd Owen Watkins came to Good Hope Mission. When the subject of opening up a new missionary front north of the Limpopo in Mashonaland was broached, Moleli volunteered his services as a teacher in this venture. He and several other African evangelists finally arrived in Salisbury in August 1892.

The years 1893-6 represent the last phase in Moleli's life. He was permitted by Chief Nenguwo to open a school in his village, where Moleli showed himself to be a teacher of rare resourcefulness and innovation. However, despite his successes and ability, he found himself in conflict with Shona custom on issues ranging from marriage and respect for ancestors to dress code and related issues. Many traditional rigorists considered Moleli's teaching pernicious and their only solution to the disasters that had ravished the land was to withdraw the children from Moleli's school and to arrange its ultimate closure. Conscious of this ominous situation yet at the same time sympathizing with the people in their plight, Moleli was undaunted: the school had to go on. Reassured by Chief Nenguwo of his support, Moleli remained committed to his dwindling congregation.

Moleli remained true to his faith even during the 1896 uprising. His attempt to save the life of James White, a settler farmer, undeterred by the sinister monitoring of his (Moleli's) activities by traditional rigorists led by Chiriseri, was a manifest act of selfless love for his neighbour. This act was pretext enough for Chiriseri and his followers to murder Moleli.

Graaf, unlike Jean Farrant who wrote on Bernard Mizeki, does not pretend to give a definitive biography of Moleli. As Graaf himself says, the text of this publication was completed as a dissertation in 1969 but has been published, unchanged, twenty years later. A major problem arises, therefore, since modern scholarly trends are not considered. For instance, Graaf's treatment of the

1896-7 uprisings is clearly ignorant of modern research which demolishes much of Ranger's *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia* on which the author relies absolutely.

In spite of its shortcomings the biography will no doubt appeal to a wide range of people interested in local history. The book is a fitting tribute to a great teacher and martyr, one who laid a strong foundation to what later became the famous Nenguwo Training Institute (Waddilove). That the book should come from a long-serving teacher and pastor at the Institute is a recognition of the rare educational and evangelistic qualities that Moleli possessed.

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**Ezivusa Usinga** Gweru. Mambo Press in association with the Literature Bureau, 1989. 253 pp., ISBN 0-86922-448-4, Z\$16.00.

This anthology contains examples of the work of Ndebele poets who have been represented in previous anthologies, such as J. N. T. Dupute, P. S. Malunjwa, B. L. M. D. Ndlovu, O. L. Mlilo, N. C. G. Mathema, D. E. Ndoda and N. S. Sigogo, to mention a few. New poets have been included, but apart from D. N. Ncube and D. F. Gumpo, the new poets have, on average, only two poems each compared to the nine each of the more established poets.

The new authors might be expected to provide a new trend, a new approach, a freshness of ideas and presentation, a new rhythm and a movement towards a new poetic excellence, but they simply seem to be following an established pattern in respect of an established poetic tradition. Emphasis is still placed on the familiar and now common Ndebele forms of linkages: parallelism, chiasmus, and regular end-rhyme in couplet form with a recurrent spicing of free verse. The poets still resort to disguised repetitions in terms of noun-verb linkages, alliteration and assonance, imagery links and symbolism, open repetition of identical items, and phrase and verse forms. The new poets are respecting an old tradition nurtured in secondary-school education and emphasized in teacher-training colleges and the University. The poetic style of the new poets seems to be tame, uniform and hedged between stable 'acceptable' and known boundaries.

The themes covered in the anthology range from Ndebele traditions and customs through modernism to the Zimbabwe liberation war (pp. 8, 11, 13, 22, 30, 156, 182, 222, 226). Love is explored (pp. 63, 66-73, 154, 159, 202, 211, 221, 247) as are death (pp. 20, 31, 136, 209, 229, 233) and life (pp. 196, 199, 200, 237). At the same time, a miscellany of experiences covering the natural world, money, youth, old age, party politics, jealousy, pain and happiness are explored as well.

In general the poet's private experiences are explored, giving most of the poems a first-hand interpretation. The safe retreat by some poets into private experiences robs the book of a certain degree of concentration. The accountability of poets in socio-economic and political concerns is thereby affected. The poets have placed themselves in a relatively safe position and have apparently ignored social challenges. The book does not look at the war, heroes and socialism with insight. The future vision seems to be ideologically bankrupt and optimistically